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**DRUG TRAFFICKER WHO SHOT MANATEE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPUTY
SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT, CODEFENDANT RECEIVES 27 YEARS**

Tampa - United States District Judge Elizabeth A. Kovachevich sentenced Tulani James COOPER, age 26, on October 5, 2007, to life imprisonment for his role in a Manatee County drug conspiracy which culminated in the shooting of Manatee County Sheriff's Deputy Lt. Todd Shear by Cooper during the execution of a search warrant at a drug house in July 2006. Cooper also received two separate consecutive sentences of seven years' imprisonment and 25 years' imprisonment for using a gun during a drug trafficking crime. Judge Kovachevich sentenced codefendant Jermaine Lenard MOSS, age 27, to a 27-year prison term for his role in the conspiracy.

On June 26, 2007, a jury found COOPER and MOSS guilty of separate counts of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine and conspiracy to unlawfully use firearms during a drug trafficking crime. The jury also found Tulani COOPER guilty of two counts of using a firearm during a drug trafficking crime involving the kidnaping and shooting of Lt. Shear. In addition, COOPER was found guilty of one count of possession with intent to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine and one count of being a convicted felon in possession of a firearm. MOSS was also found guilty of a separate count of distributing more than five grams of crack cocaine.

Eight other defendants in the case pled guilty previously and have been sentenced. Robert Lee WILLIAMS received a sentence of 19 years' imprisonment; Chancey COOPER received a sentence of 14 years' imprisonment; Maurice HAMILTON received a sentence of 22 years' imprisonment; Trinidad HAMILTON received a sentence of 29 years' imprisonment; and Jarvis McCANTS received a sentence of 46 months' imprisonment, all for their respective roles in the conspiracy. Defendants Anthony WARRICK, Arnell ELROD, and Terry EADY all await sentencing and also face lengthy prison terms.

COOPER and MOSS, along with the eight other defendants, were indicted on November 8, 2006. According to the evidence presented at trial the group comprised a violent drug trafficking organization based in Bradenton. The defendants used a cellular telephone network to distribute more than 8 kilograms of crack cocaine which they produced at local residences. During a six-month period, approximately 175,000 telephone calls were documented occurring to and from the drug trafficking organization's cell phones. Some of that drug trafficking activity was conducted by defendants while they were in jail.

In June of 2006, Tulani COOPER and several of the other defendants confronted three individuals at gunpoint whom they thought had robbed one of their houses of two kilograms of cocaine and several thousand dollars. In July of 2006, the investigation of this drug trafficking organization culminated with the execution of a search warrant by the Manatee County Sheriff's Office at the organization's drug house. During the search, Tulani James COOPER shot Lt. Todd Shear who narrowly escaped being fatally injured after the bullet struck his hand and neck.

In announcing the sentences, Acting United States Attorney James R. Klindt said, "The United States' support for local law enforcement in their pursuit of violent drug traffickers will continue and we consider it a top priority to pursue the individuals who use guns in their drug trade."

The case was investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the Manatee County Sheriff's Office. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matthew Perry.

